



Constitutions Online

[Constitution, Charters of Freedom](#) National Archives

[Interactive Constitution](#)
National Constitution Center

[Michigan Constitution \(Current and Historical\)](#) Michigan Legislature

At the Learning Center

The Michigan Supreme Court Learning Center, a hands-on gallery in the Hall of Justice, offers tours and events, like Constitution Day, for the public.

Free guided tours are available weekdays, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. (except court holidays).

Call to schedule today!
517-373-7171

Constitution Day

On September 17, 1787, delegates signed the U.S. Constitution. To commemorate this historical event, federal law requires schools that receive federal funding and all federal agencies to hold programs about the Constitution on or near that date each year. Below is a “best of” set of resources featured in past issues of [Justitia](#), the Learning Center’s educator e-newsletter.

Fast Constitution Facts

U.S. Constitution	Michigan Constitution of 1963
Signed September 17, 1787. World's oldest written constitution still in effect	Written, 1961–62; adopted, 1963; supersedes state constitutions of 1835, 1850, and 1908
Begins with “We the People”	Begins with “We the People”
Defines the roles and powers of three branches of government	Defines the roles and powers of three branches of government
Lists rights of the people in the Bill of Rights, amendments adopted in 1791	Lists rights of the people in the Declaration of Rights in Article 1, directly following the Preamble

At courts.mi.gov/learningcenter

The Educator Resources page includes an array of information and lessons. See the [Constitutions](#) page for Constitution Day resources and links.



Examining the Constitution



Do you ask your students to examine facsimile or electronic copies of original documents? Many high-resolution versions of the U.S. Constitution, Bill of Rights, and Michigan Constitution are available online. Some sites have exciting zoom features, while others allow downloading or printing. If you prefer a low-tech option, you could even purchase paper facsimiles.

Students enjoy working in pairs or triads as they decipher the historical handwriting. It may be helpful to supply typed transcripts or assign older students to transcribe certain sections and compare their findings, since the task can be challenging.

To use online documents, you will need electronic devices, preselected websites that feature original documents, and typed transcripts. For paper documents, you will need printed or purchased facsimiles, typed transcripts, and magnifying glasses.

Websites with Original Documents

[Zoom in on the U.S. Constitution](#) and [Zoom in on the Bill of Rights](#), Colonial Williamsburg

[Constitution Primary Source Set](#), Library of Congress

[Charters of Freedom, High-Resolution Downloads](#), National Archives and Records Administration

Which Constitution?

Michigan's judges swear (or affirm) to uphold the Michigan Constitution and the U.S. Constitution, so they must have detailed knowledge of both. How much do you know about these two important documents? (Answers below.)

	U.S.	Mich.
1) World's oldest written constitution.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2) Approved by voters in 1963.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3) Defines three branches of government.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4) Begins "We the people . . ."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5) Protects the rights of those accused of crimes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6) Protects the rights of crime victims.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7) Guarantees the right of trial by jury.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Answers: 1) U.S., 2) Mich., 3) Both, 4) Both, 5) Both, 6) Mich., 7) Both.

Separation of Powers

In the United States, the federal government has distinct and independent branches. The [U.S. Constitution](#) defines the federal government's legislative, executive, and judicial branches and their powers in Articles I–III. These three separate branches of government share power, and each branch serves as a check on the power of the others. State governments follow the same model. The [Michigan Constitution](#) outlines the branches of government and their powers in Articles IV–VI.

Branch	Power	U.S. Constitution	Michigan Constitution
Legislative	Makes	Article I	Article IV
		Congress (Senate, Representatives)	Senate, House of Representatives
Executive	Enforces	Article II	Article V
		President	Governor
Judicial	Interprets	Article III	Article VI
		Supreme Court, Lower Courts Established by Congress	Supreme Court, Court of Appeals, Circuit Court, Probate Court, and Courts of Limited Jurisdiction Established by the Legislature

An Independent Judiciary

The [U.S. Constitution](#) provides an important framework for the federal judicial branch of government:

- An independent judiciary with a Supreme Court and other federal courts and their jurisdiction ([Article III](#)).
- A process by which the President appoints judges with the advice and consent of the Senate ([Article II](#)).
- Protections for judges from retaliation for unpopular decisions – Judges hold office during good behavior, can only be removed through legislative impeachment, and cannot have their salaries reduced as long as they hold office ([Article I](#), [Article III](#)).

In much the same way, the [Michigan Constitution](#) outlines the state's judiciary in [Article VI](#). It includes:

- An independent judiciary with power vested in one court of justice, composed of a Supreme Court, a Court of Appeals, a Circuit Court, a Probate Court, and other lower courts. Jurisdictions are also defined.
- Judicial qualifications, elections, and a process of appointments in the event of judicial vacancies.
- Judicial salaries with protection against decreases and a process for handling cases of judicial misconduct.

For more about the state and federal judiciaries, see:

Federal Judicial Center – [History](#)

Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society – [History](#)

Michigan Supreme Court Learning Center – [Michigan's State Courts](#)

Visualizing Constitution Data

Word Clouds

When analyzing complex texts such as the U.S. Constitution, it can be helpful to create visual representations. Word clouds highlight words that appear frequently in source text (excluding common words). They can be used to identify ideas, themes, and key terms. In fact, scholars from the [Comparative Constitutions Project](#) use word clouds to [visualize data](#) when comparing constitutions from different countries.



Preamble

Teachers and students can create and analyze their own word clouds by pasting [text from the U.S. Constitution](#) into free websites such as [WordClouds](#) or [Tagxedo](#).

Charts, Tables, & Timelines

Below are links to additional graphic data about the U.S. Constitution and constitutions around the world. These sources were created by the Comparative Constitutions Project and their partners.

[Historical Sources for the Bill of Rights](#), co-created with the [National Constitution Center](#)

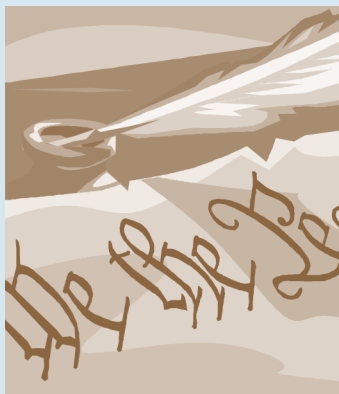
[Timeline of Constitutions](#)

[World Constitutional Holidays](#)



Article III

Judicial Branch of Government



We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

“We the People” Video

The phrase “We the People,” which appears at the beginning of the U. S. Constitution and the Michigan Constitution, is featured in a [3-minute video](#) by the Michigan Supreme Court. Appropriate for elementary and above, the discussion is presented by [Milton L. Mack, Jr.](#), State Court Administrator and former probate judge.

Writing a Classroom Constitution

In the [We the Students](#) lesson from the Constitutional Rights Foundation of Chicago, students use the U.S. Constitution as a model to write their own preamble and “articles” (rules) for their classroom.



Using Primary Sources

Constitution Day is the perfect time to introduce students of all levels to primary sources! The following websites offer resources and ideas for teaching with our nation’s and state’s founding documents.

[Constitution Day Primary Source Tool Kit](#) Library of Congress

[Docs Teach: Revolution and the New Nation](#) National Archives

[Teaching with Documents: Observing Constitution Day](#) National Archives

The Constitution and the Rule of Law

The United States was founded on the concept of the Rule of Law. This principle means that everyone – including the government – is accountable under just laws that are enacted and enforced equally and that justice is delivered by neutral officials (judges).

According to [Article IV](#) of the U.S. Constitution, judges in every state are bound to uphold the nation’s founding document as the “supreme law of the land.” Equal treatment is embodied in the [Fifth Amendment](#) guarantee of due process of law, and the [Fourteenth Amendment](#), which entitles every citizen to “equal protection under the laws.”

In discussing the Rule of Law, the [U.S. Courts website](#) concludes: “Equality before the law is such an essential part of the American system of government that, when a majority, whether acting intentionally or unintentionally, infringes upon the rights of a minority, the Court may see fit to hear both sides of the controversy in court.”



More about the Rule of Law

American Bar Association – [Dialogue on the Rule of Law](#) (MS and above)

U.S. Courts – [Rule of Law Educational Resources](#) (HS and above)

Utah Education Network – [Rules and Laws Lesson Plan](#) (Elementary)

World Justice Project – [Rule of Law Index](#) analyzes factors in countries worldwide

Image Courtesy State Capitol of Michigan